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April 17, 2017

EDU 402

Philosophy of Education

Within the four walls of my classroom that will I call home throughout my career, I will be a public-school teacher of the United States of America with dreams of changing the world, starting with my students. I was born and raised in Portland, Maine where I lived the days of my childhood staring at my social studies teachers in admiration. When I was in seventh grade, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I am a white woman, born in 1995, qualifying myself as a millennial, although they do not maintain a positive reflection today to some preceding generations. I hope to change society’s negative perceptions about millennials by showing them I am a passionate, hard worker that believes in accomplishments, not entitlement. I come from a family with values, many of which I have carried with me in my early adult life. A family where missing Sunday dinner was not an option, and most disagreements among parents and siblings ending in belly laughs on the floor. I celebrate my Greek ethnicity often through food and cultural celebrations with my family who is humbled to be right in the middle of middle class.

Through my life, I have developed the belief that it is powerful to be passionate about something in life. My passions are people, learning, art, and nature. I luckily get to enjoy them often and with people that embrace the same or other passions of their own. Fortunately, working with children is something I have had the opportunity to enjoy often. I receive fulfillment out of being creative, which mostly takes form of art hung around places that I live. Another passion of mine is being connected to nature. Through hiking, paddle boarding, and trail running, nature often offers me a quiet time to reflect and prioritize things of importance. The passion that I plan on making my career is learning. Learning provides me with constant amazement and appreciation for life. I hope this part of my philosophy will impact my students by helping them discover their own passions and appreciation for the life they’re living.

Life experiences that have influenced my philosophy of education mainly reside in the people that have made a difference in my life at some point in time. This is not limited to the many educators; although they have contributed the most, but also family members, close friends, and peers. Throughout my life, I have been blessed with a solid support system. People I count on time and time again for favors big and small. They have seen me through hardships, but also many exciting and joyful moments throughout my life. Having a family that is caring and set high standards for my education; friends that provide motivation; and educators that challenge my intellect and belief systems create an environment for success. This community of people believing in me and putting a smile on my face will impact my philosophy of education because I hope to be everything my support system is to me, to my own students. I want students to seek me out for motivation, setting high standards, a smile, and deepening their intellect and understanding of the ginormous world around them.

The content area of social studies provides an exciting backdrop to teach students about the world that they live in. Using the Teaching Tolerance anti-bias framework, students will understand history and social sciences through the four lenses of identity, justice, diversity, and action.. This ambitious framework can be successful through conveying different accounts of the same events within history. My goal is to allow students to interpret the past using critical thinking skills, while simultaneously engaging them with academic differentiation. Basically, I want to trick my students into learning, and make sure they are having fun while doing it.

Aside from content, I want to teach my students life skills that will become purposeful to them outside of school. Students that learn and practice respect, empathy, kindness, and open-mindedness will not only be better people, but will hopefully set the tone for society itself. In today’s world, where the continued unrest and angst regarding the stability of the future impacts everyday life, these skills will allow my students to make sense of the chaos, and hopefully love themselves in the process. As humanist and teacher Desiderius Erasmus once stated: “The purpose of education was to enlighten the youth and thus improve the civil state” (Murphy).

My students will consist of variety; difference faces that each have a different story of who they are, where they are from, their values and beliefs. My students will be different genders, races, ethnicities, ages, and many other characteristics and defining traits. Diversity will be embraced throughout my classroom, and students will see each other’s differences as strengths, not weaknesses.

I will teach students, parents, co-workers, the community, and myself. As an educator, I believe it is important to learn the most I can about everything. An admirable professor once told me: “the day you decide to stop learning, is the day that you should stop teaching.” This saying has impacted my educational philosophy throughout my college education, and really transformed the way I think about education. I hope to be constantly learning about anything that will benefit my students and their educational experience, fulfilling my students and myself simultaneously.

By constantly learning something new everyday, I will be setting the tone for my students. Teaching through example can be a powerful way to teach, when enacted appropriately. How can I expect my student to come prepared and ready to learn each day, when I am not? Often times, when students see a teacher that is unprepared, or not well educated on what they are teaching, respect is automatically decreased. Not only is respect decreased in a student-teacher relationship, but the appearance of not being dependable is also questioned. I want to be a teacher that students can depend on for any sort of academic or social need they have. By setting an example of being prepared and dependable, I would want to see the same out of my students. Teaching through modeling is one method I plan on using regarding how to teach my students.

Other various methods on how I will teach students are through Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation, and enthusiasm. UDL is a methodology I have learned in special education and general education courses taken at the University of Maine at Farmington. The key principles in UDL are providing students with multiple means of representation, action and expression, as well as engagement. Through these methods, student learning and curriculum becomes inclusive and accessible for every student in the classroom. Differentiation is similar to the action and expression component in UDL, which basically requires teachers to accommodate for student’s unique learning styles. Every student represents an individual identity comprised of what makes him or her distinctive. Accommodating for these differences means changes teaching styles or presentations to give the student the best chance at comprehension. This also means that teachers should provide students with different ways to express their learning, giving students the chance to display autonomy with their content comprehension.

Lastly, I will teach my students through enthusiasm. Having an educator sleepily depict battles of the civil war will have any eager learner with glazed over eyes until the end of the period. Using enthusiasm is a method I will teach students with because it is what they deserve. Students deserve a teacher who is excited to come to work each day and share their knowledge because they cannot possibly contain it within themselves. Teaching with enthusiasm will be one of my strengths because I am passionate about my subject matter, and the students I am building a relationship with.

Methods of how I will teach my students was influenced by the special education courses I have had the pleasure of taking at UMF. In my first two years as a secondary education major, I did not have a well-versed understanding of the special education field. During my junior year, I decided to declare a minor in special education that transformed the way I viewed education as a whole. Throughout taking special education courses, my confidence soared, and I felt very excited to begin my career with my new founded skills. Special education impacted my philosophy of education because I am a full believer in inclusivity for all students, and I am no longer hesitant of how to integrate student with IEPs within my general education classroom. The benefits to having a special education background not only turned me into an advocate for students with disabilities, but also gave me the skills to become an effective educator. I say this because most of my special education classes focused on the strategies used to help students learn in a general education setting. Using these strategies such as UDL, I will have more of an understanding and be ready to help students succeed in all aspects of their adolescence life.

Adolescent life can provide many obstacles for young people in being present in their educational experience. Poverty, cultural and gender issues, and English language learners are some issues in education that may be impacting students. Students who are living in poverty may not be present in their education because their basic needs are not being met; basic needs that include but are not limited to: cleanliness, nutrition, security, or lack of resources. When students are missing one of their basic needs, they may lose focus because they are preoccupied with issues impacting their lives outside of school. One way I will accommodate for this issue is providing discreet help to students who may be in need. A simple help, such as providing snacks to students who appear hungry and unfocused, can have a lasting impact on a student living in poverty unsure of when they are going to eat next.

Cultural and gender issues present another obstacle for some students who are dealing with these types of problems outside or in school. Students need to be represented as equals, and oftentimes that is not the case in the classroom or in today’s society. Often, teachers have gender and racial biases and their students fall victim to an unfair, close-minded educator. Interventions that can be taken to combat this problem are having an open discussion regarding race and gender issues with students in class to make sure they understand and respect each other’s differences. Another intervention teachers can take is educating themselves on the inequalities our society still faces, and trying not to replicate them inside the classroom. A teacher who is aware and tries to combat their own prejudges and biases will most likely benefit from deeper student-teacher connections and relationships.

Another obstacle for some students might be if they are English language learners (ELL). Students who are learning English as a second language make up almost 10% of student enrolled in public schools across America. Some difficulties that might accompany ELL students are lack of comprehension, because they do not fully understand the English language yet. There are many accommodations that can be used with ELL students such as RTI and making sure a teacher can build a relationship off of shared common interests. Making ELL students feel secure in an inclusive setting is a successful intervention any school district can take. There are more educational issues that impact student’s education, teachers, and the field of education itself every day. It is essential for teachers to be aware of these issues and have strategies to combat them so they do not disrupt the learning of students. Specific schools of educational philosophies can help teachers in establishing a belief system that honors the student and their educational success.

The school of educational philosophy that I think best embodies the teacher I want to be, and my belief system is pragmatism. Pragmatism is the educational philosophy that is student-centered, meaning that the focus of education is on the development of the whole student, not simply the content they are learning. Much like the beliefs of educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi who “believed that children were made up of head, heart, hand, body, feelings, and intellect, thus introducing the concept of educating the "whole child" long before the twentieth-century" (Murphy). Pragmatism allows students to be comfortable in their educational environment, increasing the likelihood of deeper understanding and application of content and skills learned. Educational theories that fall under this philosophy to an extent are progressivism and humanism.

Progressivism is a student-centered educational theory that highlights the notion of how students should learn, not what students learn. Progressivism believes that through critical analysis and experimentation students will uncover the truths of knowledge. Under the theory, students who learn with these standards placed on them will better society by remaining open-minded, and looking at things critically once they graduate school. John Dewey, an educational revolutionary believed in progressivism as well stating: “Education must be democratic, providing students with free and intelligent choice between alternatives and engaging them in meaningful interactions with their environment - the subject matter, the teachers, and peers” (Murphy). I hope to embody the aspects of John Dewey in my own classroom by teaching my students components of critical thinking, and making their education applicable to their surrounding environment.

Another student-centered educational theory is humanism. Through the belief that everyone contains an innate goodness in him or her, the humanism theory was developed. The humanism theory contains the notions that school is a place to further self-actualization through a fully autonomous education. The role of the teacher is simply to be a guide to the student in their quest for self-actualization. Using this theory, student’s motivation for learning becomes intrinsic through time. If I am hoping to change the world through my classroom, these educational philosophies and theories will remain as pillars in my own personal philosophy.

My philosophy of education will impact my classroom in a number of ways, from assessment, classroom organization, content area, to classroom climate, learning focuses, technology integration and teaching styles, all factors of my classroom will be impacted by student-centered learning. Starting with classroom organization, it will be essential to the success of my students so it is imperative to establish a system for lesson and curriculum development. My philosophy states I need to be prepared to set an example for student success. In doing so, lessons will be well thought-out and planned over. I will probably over-plan for my lessons just to make sure students are getting the most out of the allotted time they are in my four walls. Physical classroom set up will follow the same precedent of being organized. There will be labels for everything, encouraging class mottos, and samples of student work on the wall. Actual arrangement of furniture in my classroom will depend of what activities are set for the day.

Social studies provides such as interesting lens for students to think critically about the society they are in and the world around them. Learning focuses will be found within the content, but also include many social skills. Using educational philosophy inspiration from the theorist John Dewey, who believed that education’s purpose was to educate the whole student to in turn benefit society. Using social studies, and the teaching tolerance anti-bias framework, students will be able to use their critical thinking skills in order to make sense of and critique their surroundings. Assessment in my classroom will take form in multiple ways using the UDL method. UDL requires multiple means of expression, which means that students should have various ways to demonstrate their understanding. In my classroom, this can be achieved by giving students choice in how they convey their content understanding.

I want my classroom climate to be built upon respect, specifically students that respect themselves, each other, their environment, and myself. I think respect is an important aspect of being successful in school and out of school. I also want my students to feel safe when they are in my classroom. When students feel safe to be themselves, they will form deeper connections with their peers, and with the classroom climate, they will get respect in return. Motivation among students will be crucial to their success. I want to serve as a motivating cheerleader to students when they need an extra boost of encouragement. I also want to establish a classroom culture in which students are supportive of one another, in turn motivating each other much like I was motivated by my peers when I was a student. By leading by example, being a support for my student, and using differentiated instruction, I will accommodate for students learning styles and model good leadership skills that they can observe and duplicate if they so choose.

My philosophy of education will impact a school district because I am a millennial that is breaking the negative stereotypes and using education to change the world. I hope to contribute passion, empathy, and drive to the field of education. It is very disheartening to observe teachers who do not are not excited to come to work everyday. When I sign a teaching contact, I am signing a contract to make a positive difference in the world. Hopefully, using my passion of working with children, I will be able to reach students affected by educational issues, and steer them in the right direction. I want to be a motivation to my students, and help them succeed in the classroom and outside of the classroom so they too can one day have an impact on society.